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THE TREATMENT OF IDEALS

IN

SANTAYANA'S LIFE OF REASON

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CHAPTER I.

THE LIFE OF REASON.

"The life of reason, as I conceive it, is simply the dreaming mind becoming coherent, devising symbols and methods, such as languages, by which it may fitly survey its own career, and the forces of nature on which that career depends. Reason thereby raises our vegetative career into a poetic revelation and transcript of the truth."[1]

In these two sentences George Santayana has not only sketched his conception of the life of reason and suggested the ideals which are the subject of this thesis, but has pointed out two of the three elements which mark his philosophy, namely, poetry and naturalism. It must be remembered that Santayana is a poet of no mean rank among the moderns. It is altogether natural, therefore, that he should admit poetic conceits into his more serious writings and should see poetic tendencies in the somewhat

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1. Santayana, George, Jour. of Philosophy, Vol. 18, No. 26, Dec. 22, 1921, p. 705.

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lyrical life of reason.

Poetry, however, has not carried Santayana into philosophical extravagances, because it has been held in check by an even stronger impulse toward naturalism. At one time Santayana followed the philosophy of Hume. Becoming dissatisfied, however, with the futility of this reason, he finally evolved a more satisfying scheme of thought along naturalistic lines. Here, although admitting that his conclusions are but imaginings, he nevertheless submits them for inspection, confident that the facts will justify the fiction. He does not hesitate, therefore, to postulate the life of reason as arising from a backcurrent, or eddy, in the continuous and chaotic flux of impulse and sensation. The first real step upward in this life of reason comes with the attachment of pleasure and pain to objects and the recognition of values, or ideal interests.

But poetry and naturalism are not the only characteristics of Santayana's philosophy. The third element is loyalty to the Greeks. In his scheme of thought he embodies the teachings of Parmenides and Heraclitus, of Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato. So completely has he imbibed their philosophy that he might be called The Living Greek.

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Santayana does not, however, content himself with a mere hodge-podge of primitive conceptions. Not only has he sorted and combined the teachings of his masters; he has given their words a new dress. It may be that the truth is unchanging. Whether it be so or not, men change and knowledge increases. To be valued, old truths must be linked up with the new discoveries and restated in language comprehensible to the modern ear. It is this task of modernizing and enlarging classic truths which Santayana purposes. So it is that The Life of Reason, while largely new in thought, is yet an outgrowth and an interpretation of the intellectual labors of Heraclitus, Plato, and their compeers.

Fidelity to the Greeks appears in Santayana's earliest conception of the birth of reason. Starting with the flux of Heraclitus, in this case a subjective chaos of unordered impulse and imagination, Santayana traces the course of human intelligence. In its development he employs the constant laws of union and separation postulated by Democritus, by which recurring and differing sensations build up an impression of external realities. He also makes use of the unchanging unity of Parmenides, illustrated by the ideal. Through-

out he maintains the objective and naturalistic point of view characteristic of these early philosophers.

Santayana is further a Greek in his theory of knowledge, which is distinctly skeptical. He denies any portraiture of outer events. Knowledge is merely representative. It consists solely in those interpretations of the object which are given by nervous reactions. There can be no direct contact of mind and external object.

Not with Greek naturalism, however, nor with a skeptical concept of knowledge, does Santayana pause. It is in his treatment of the later Greeks that he sweeps on to his most interesting conclusions. For not only does he approach that realm of the ideal or universal which so absorbed both Plato and Aristotle, but he makes their problem his. He devotes his attention to a reinterpretation which shall reveal the inward harmony of the apparently differing views.

It will be remembered that Plato created ideal absolutes. All true existences he believed to be ideal. The world of sense was for him merely a land of shadowy images, reflections or imperfect copies of eternal verities. And this conception Santayana

accepts in part. He, too, creates permanent realities out of ideals. Nevertheless, he makes a certain reservation. Those ideals do not--can not--exist independent of the human mind. Further, they must necessarily be linked to that world of sense which Plato considers so imperfect a counterpart of the universals.

It is in this correlation of the ideal and the physical that Santayana agrees with Aristotle. For the latter philosopher "everything ideal has a natural basis and everything natural an ideal development."[1] But this fact Santayana finds to be no obstacle. When reality has an ideal dimension the "world of ideas" may still exist.

Perhaps Santayana draws his own naturalism from this naturalistic position of Aristotle. At any rate, in his theory of the ideal, which is stated in the following chapters, he shows an ideal Platonic in its reality as well as Aristotelian in its naturalism. And over all of this he casts his characteristic glow of poesy.

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1. Ibid. p. 21.

CHAPTER II.

THE ENTRANCE OF IDEALS.

One of the early steps in the birth of reason is the attachment of pleasure or pain to objects. From that attachment there arises in the mind a perception of interests. Certain objects appear more desirable because they contain more good. The whole life of reason, Santayana declares, is nothing more or less than the unity given to existence by a mind in love with the good. "When definite interests are recognized and the values of things are estimated by that standard, action at the same time veering in harmony with that estimation, then reason has been born and a moral world has risen."[1] Life depends upon the fixation of interests and begins to have value and continuity when something definite to live for, namely, ideals, appears.

Just what is an ideal? Ordinarily it might be defined as consciousness of a value. Yet such a definition is all too brief to account for the conception of the ideal which appears in The Life of Reason.

In the first place, an ideal is a fundamental of the life of reason. Just as the mind is natively inclined

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1. Santayana, George, The Life of Reason, Vol. I., Introduction and Reason in Common Sense, p. 47. Scribner's, New York, 1905.

toward form and identification in the external world, so it has an inherent tendency toward expression in idealization. In fact, Santayana declares that consciousness really cares only for its ideals.[1] The ideal is that standard which thought proposes to itself, and while thought itself cannot have in its process a luminous deductive clearness, yet it does endow its product with that quality. Every ideal initially envisages a genuine and innocent good. It is a goal set by intelligence. And the life of reason, according to Santayana, "will be a name for that part of experience which perceives and pursues ideals--all conduct so controlled and all sense so interpreted as to perfect natural happiness."[2]

No ideal can be adventitious and unmeaning. There is no more colossal error, to Santayana, than the belief that ideals have no soil in mortal life and no possible fulfilment there. An ideal is the sum of given demands, a resultant or synthesis of impulses already afoot. As an expression of human nature in operation it must in the end involve the primary human faculties.[3] Since human nature varies, its ideal can not, of course, have a greater constancy than the demands which it expresses. "Ideals are free," says Santayana, "but they are neither more numerous nor more variable than the living natures that

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1. Ibid., p. 49.
2. Ibid., p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 267.

generate them."[1] Nevertheless, that which is essentially a human outgrowth cannot be adventitious and unmeaning, regardless of its variability or of its possible fulfilment.

Indeed, to deny the meaning of the ideal is to deny the value of science. All science is fundamentally ideal since it is primarily concerned with validity and truth, which are ideal relations. The ideal is the foundation of all art, of religion, and of society. The very conception of the external world by which man lives, his belief that nature is a unity, is ideal. And it is only in the realm of ideals that omniscience can ever be found.

Furthermore, why should ideals be adventitious? They are not miraculous forces, superimposed. Thought is a form of life as natural as nutrition or generation. Equally natural is the product of rationality, the ideal. Every ideal has a natural basis; everything natural an ideal development. Though one grants that sense be the sole reality, must it not even then, asks Santayana, be sentient sometimes of the ideal?[2] The relation between the two resembles that of the site of a city and the city which has been reared upon it. Both exist; both are significant. So living thought, even though dealing with

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1. Ibid., p. 8
2. Ibid., p. 79.

a sensuous content, may pass out of itself in the direction of the ideal, of the eventual.

That the ideal has a natural basis is indicated by internal evidence. "Every phase of the ideal world," Santayana declares, "emanates from the natural and loudly proclaims its origin by the interest it takes in natural existences, of which it gives a rational interpretation."[1] For, he asks, "what are ideals about, what do they idealize, except natural existences and natural passions?"[2] The fact is that Nature blossoms with ideals which, according to Santayana, are forerunners of her success. "Nature carries its ideal with it and...the progressive organization of irrational impulses makes a rational life."[3]

But, comes the question, how about the reality of ideals? Are they not mere figments of reason? Santayana's answer is decisive. "In an original thinker," he states, "to call a thing supernatural, or spiritual, or intelligible, is to declare that it is no <u>thing</u> at all...but a value... a merely ideal principle."[4] But does an ideal have to be physical to be real? The demands which gave rise to it are real, just as the stimulus which gives rise to a sensation. "The ideal has the same relation to given demands

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1. Ibid., p. 235.
2. Ibid., p. 282.
3. Ibid., p. 291.
4. Ibid., p. 194.

that the reality has to given perceptions."[1]

Indeed, Santayana declares, the ideal may be more real than an external object. Philosophers, he says, have transferred to the living act what is true only of its ideal and have given it static terms and eternal relations. As a matter of fact, the external object, so far as accurate reproduction of it in the mind is concerned, is nothing but flux. "What helps in the first place to disclose a permanent object is a permanent sensation. Existence reveals reality when the flux discloses something permanent that dominates it." And such is the working of the human mind that what is thus dominated, though it be the primary existence itself, is thereby degraded to appearance. "Ideal objects may accordingly be in a way more real and enduring than things external."[2] For after all, what is a reality but a term of speech, based on a psychological complex of memories, associations, and expectations, but constituted in its ideal independence by the assertive energy of thought?[3] Santayana points out that the object which we consider a reality is an ideal representative of a group of sensations, and not any one sensation alone. External

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1. Ibid., p. 257.
2. Ibid., p. 131.
3. Ibid., p. 82.

objects are merely conceived realities on an ideal plane. The single nature or set of conditions for experience which the intellect constructs is the object of our thoughts and perceptions ideally completed.[1] And since the ideal remains while the flux of sensation passes on, ideal objects have a permanence which designates them as real.

The fact is that an ideal world is recognized by reason from the beginning. The first reactions which result in the development of rationality are reactions to spiritual realities. Without the harmony of reason, of course, the ideal loses its finality. But so does knowledge of the external world. Given this harmony, "henceforth things actual and things desired are confronted by an ideal which has both pertinence and authority"[2] due to its living stability. "Knowledge reaches reality when it touches its ideal goal. Reality is known when, as in mathematics, a stable and unequivocal object is developed by thinking."[3]

The function of the ideal is practical; it is a guide to the interpretation and utilization of experience. It serves as a link between fact and fact. As the object of a profound and voluminous desire for the good, it should light man forward like a torch, revealing new and

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1. Ibid., p. 106.
2. Ibid., p. 268.
3. Ibid., p. 80.

better fields beyond.

Ideals are essentially representative. As goals they serve to signify all that appears most desirable, all that man strives to attain. But ideals are also regulative, since they act as guides to conduct. They help man to lead himself out of his dream "by the promise and eloquence of that dream itself."[1] Further, ideals give permanence, stability to concepts which are necessary to man's development. They envisage the absent and make it appear attainable. The ideal, says Santayana, "really fosters all possible pleasures."[2]

Yet the ideal does not in the least conflict with nature. It is in reality in harmony with natural forces, and far from demanding any profound revolution, merely expresses her actual tendency and forecasts what her perfect functioning would be.[3]

Previously it has been stated that an ideal is the object of a profound and voluminous human desire--the outgrowth of human needs. It is a guide which reason creates to point the path toward constantly increasing good. Yet ideals are discarded as human nature varies.

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1. Ibid., p. 54.
2. Ibid., p. 266.
3. Ibid., p. 267.

Does this mean that ideals have no practical value? No ideal bears a tag to show its worth. Yet the test of the extrinsic value of an ideal depends upon its functioning. The ideal which satisfies the demands that condition it, which links up experience and raises it to a higher level, which guides conduct in the direction of human betterment,--that ideal has extrinsic worth. As Santayana states, "To deserve adhesion it needs only to be adequate as an ideal, that is, to express completely what the soul at present demands, and to do justice to all extant interests."[1]

It may be urged that ideals cannot always be reached by human hands; that the ideal is not practical. As a matter of fact, according to Santayana, "the greatness of the ideal has been put in its vagueness and in an elasticity which makes it wholly indeterminate."[2] Were ideals to be hard and fast, what a detriment to progress! It is the remoteness of the horizon which lures men on, unaware of the distance over which they have travelled.

After all, it is the ideal aspect that endows existence with character and value. Life is existence with values. Consciousness is the least ideal of things when

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1. Ibid., p. 255.
2. Ibid., p. 261.

reason is taken out of it, and it is reason which creates that eternal realm which is tenanted by ideals. Had ideals no other function, were they wholly unattainable, yet they would have the practical value of changing a mere existence to life. They set at once the stimulus and the goal to the life of reason.

For even though ideals had no extrinsic worth, though they failed in their function, yet proof remains of their intrinsic value. The fact that reason cannot cease to create and to cherish them shows a value which demands no other criterion. The ideal is desirable simply because it is ideal, because it represents the highest toward which man may stretch. Even though it be unattainable, it is still "what lent music to throbs and significance to being."[1]

But grant that ideals have reality; that they are essential to human happiness. Is pragmatic value sufficient warrant for a claim to validity? Further, are all ideals equally legitimate? What is the sign of their trustworthiness?

Efficacy is Santayana's touchstone in the test of legitimacy of ideals. That ideal which fulfills the function of satisfying its original demand is genuine. Those ideals alone which lack a firm basis of fact and which are, therefore, unable to perform their duty of satisfaction, are spurious.

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1. Ibid., p. 79.

But not all ideals establish their legitimacy in the same way. The test for validity varies with the field of human existence. Are scientific ideals to be judged by the same criterion as those of art, or religion? No. Just as Santayana places science and religion on distinct planes, never meeting and never conflicting, so he deals with the ideals on those planes by different methods.

The clue to this distinction lies in the basic purpose of the various fields. What does science attempt? And religion? Santayana believes that the two can never conflict because they lie in separate spheres. Science is essentially concerned with explanation. It seeks the how and the when and the why of experience. It engages primarily in a dispassionate search for information. The ideal of science, then, to prove its truth must be efficacious in assembling about it a self-supporting framework of fact. Then, and only then, may it be judged genuine.

But the legitimacy of religious ideals is another question. Here is needed no buttressing by experience. Religion is fundamentally concerned with aspiration. Even the religion arising from fear aspires to protection of the gods. And as religion becomes more rational, it

links to itself a spiritual desire for morality, for virtue. The criterion, therefore, for ideals in this field of the life of reason must be aspiration. Do religious ideals make men desire more passionately the purple heights of spirituality? And do they reward aspiration? If so, they are thereby proved legitimate. Their validity must be beyond challenge.

So much, then, for the general characteristics of ideals in rational life. In the following chapter Santayana's theory of the ideal will be discussed more concretely and its application shown in one phase of the life of reason.

CHAPTER III.

IDEALS IN RELIGION.

The life of reason takes varied forms. As the fusion of impulse and reflection, it may be found expressed in religion or science or the imitative arts. Of these, however, the first appears more intimately connected with rational life. Santayana expresses this connection in the following words: "Religion, in its intent, is a more conscious and direct pursuit of the Life of Reason than is society, science or art. For these approach and fill out the ideal life tentatively and piecemeal, hardly regarding the goal or caring for the ultimate justification of their instinctive aims."[1] Further, "religion is a form of rational living more empirical, looser, more primitive than art."[2] Hence, although language, science, art or society--all of which are compacted of ideas,--might serve as a concrete example of Santayana's use of the ideal, religion is the more satisfactory as

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1. Santayana, George, The Life of Reason, Vol. III., Reason in Religion, p. 8. Scribner's, New York, 1905.

2. Idem. p. 35.

an exemplification of the part which the ideal plays in rational life.

If reason is the process which enables men to realize their ideals, it might be well to describe more specifically the exact relation which exists between religion and rationality. In the first place, the life of reason is the seat of all ultimate values. But religion also deals with the ultimate, and when the loftiest spirits have seemed to attain the highest joys, it has usually been through religion. Therefore, Santayana concludes, "religion would.....seem to be a vehicle or a factor in rational life, since the ends of rational life are attained by it."[1] But this is not the only relation. The two operate similarly. "The Life of Reason," says Santayana, "is an ideal to which everything in the world should be subordinated; it establishes lines of moral cleavage everywhere and makes right eternally different from wrong."[2] But this very differentiation between right and wrong, this absolute moral decision is, after all, a fundamental of religion. It would seem, therefore, that religion is actually a function of the life of reason. Indeed, Santayana calls religion an imaginative symbol for the

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1. Op. cit. p. 6.

2. Idem. p. 7.

life of reason.[1]

Religion deals with much the same subjects as the life of reason, but it gives them a different form. Rational religion is not now an agent of revelation of "divine personalities, future awards, and tenderer Elysian consolations."[2] It deals with an experiential world, which it gives an ideal status. It teaches men to accept a natural life, although on supernatural grounds. It is still a poetic expression of ignorance and hope and dependence. Rational or not, religion is built on fear and aspiration. In time of need everyone turns to the gods. Religion consists of "conscious ideas, hopes, enthusiasms, and objects of worship; it operates by grace and flourishes by prayer."[3] Nevertheless, even rational religion remains a merely imaginative achievement, a symbolic representation of moral reality. This representation, however, may play an important part in vitalising the mind and in passing on the lessons taught by experience. For, after all, "religion is a part of experience itself, a mass of sentiments and ideas."

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1. Op. cit. p. 178.

2. Introduction and Reason in Common Sense, p. 12.

3. Reason in Religion, p. 8.

This same experiential characteristic of religion Santayana further refers to in another passage. "Even highly imaginative things, like poetry and religion," he says, "express real events, if not in the outer world, at least in the inner growth or discipline of life.... It is nature, or some movement of nature occurring within us or affecting us, that is the true existent object of religion."[1] Thus, religion seems to be in many cases merely a poetic naturalism.

But although it symbolizes nature, religion is not literally true. "The only truth of religion comes from its interpretation of life, from its symbolic rendering of that moral experience which it springs out of and which it seeks to elucidate."[2] As a matter of fact, the lack of literal truth is not an affair of great import. What if religion does deal with myths or "speculative fables"? Even where it deludes into a belief in its strict accuracy, it is not essentially an imposture. "Religion," says Santayana, "is an interpretation of experience, honestly made, and made in view of man's happiness and its empirical conditions. That this interpretation is poetical goes without saying, since natural

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1. Santayana, George, Jour. of Philosophy, Vol. 18, No. 26, Dec. 22, 1921, p. 703.

2. Reason in Religion, p. 11.

and moral science, even to-day, are inadequate for the task. But the mythical form into which men cast their wisdom was not chosen by them because they preferred to be imaginative..... Mythical forms were adopted because none other were available..... Whether it is the myth or the wisdom it expresses that we call religion is a matter of words."[1] The myth is merely an ideal interpretation of events in terms relative to spirit; it digests phenomena and transmutes them into imaginative tissue. All nature is at first conceived mythically. Later, however, myths serve "to carry religion over from superstition into wisdom, from an excuse and apology for magic into an ideal representation of moral goods."[2]

Here, then, we come to the relation of religion and ideals, a relation of utmost importance to the former. For, in spite of the "blind side" of religion expressed in mythology and magic, through the leaven of moral idealism religion inevitably turns toward the ultimate. So true is this that although religion may in a primitive state have been far from ideal, now-a-days men are "accustomed as a matter of course to associate religion with ideal interests."[3] And Santayana thinks that to be successful and permanent a religion must pass into contemplation and

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1. Op. cit. p. 31.

2. Op. cit. p. 66.

3. Op. cit. p. 68.

ideality.

Religion is a struggling and changing force which seems to direct man toward the eternal, toward the ideal of human aspiration. Usually this goal takes the form of a deity, a perfect being. Regarding this embodiment Santayana says, "The ideal of deity.....is nothing but the ideal of man freed from those limitations which a humble and wise man accepts for himself, but which a spiritual man never ceases to feel as limitations."[1] It is the indwelling ideal which lends all the gods their divinity.[2]

The gods of primitive man are not ideal, because they express not so much the aspiration of man as his fear. Usually they were symbols for natural forces, and thus their ideality was prejudiced. Later the myths, which were originally merely empirical descriptions, became either idols substituted for ideal values, or agents to morality by presenting men with "an ideal standard for action and a perfect object for contemplation".[3]

Pantheism fails as a religion because it makes a fetich of nature and thus neglects ideals. "Nature," Santayana declares, "neither is nor can be man's ideal. The substitution of nature for the traditional and ideal object of religion involves giving nature moral authority

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1. Op. cit. p. 45.

2. Idem. p. 190.

3. Idem. p. 66.

over man."[1]

The gods of the early Greeks were frankly natural, to be sure. Yet they were ideal because they were neither a direct expression of fear nor the immediate embodiment of natural forces. True, Apollo was the driver of the sun, and the other gods had their natural functions. But they were distinct from those functions and had a rational as well as a physical part to play.

With the later Greeks, the gods lost almost completely their natural character. The deity of Aristotle is always a moral ideal, while to Plato the deity was a universal pattern for all that was ideal in the world of experience. In this conception the latter philosopher showed a keen insight into the psychology which lies behind man's tendency toward deification.

In the Hebrew religion God was the supreme ideal, nature having no part. But this ideal was unsatisfactory because it lacked the element of aspiration, which is so decided a characteristic of Christianity. Further, such was the religion of the Jews that no liberal interests were afforded for the ideal to express. These interests were contributed to Christianity in its transition from Hebrew to Gentile. "Christianity," Santayana states, "would have remained a Jewish sect had it not been

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1. Op. cit. p. 137.

made at once speculative, universal, and ideal by the infusion of Greek thought."[1]

There is noticeable in the development of deity from the first primitive conception to the highest plane of rational religion, a decrease in the element of fear and an increase in that of aspiration. This aspiring side of religion Santayana designates as spirituality, or devotion to ideal ends. It is an ideal synthesis of all that is good. Even animal feelings may be "spiritual in their nature and, on their narrow basis, perfectly ideal. The most ideal human passion is love, which is also the most absolute and animal and one of the most ephemeral."[2] Indeed, Santayana considers spirituality the fundamental and native type of all life.[3] "A man," he says, "is spiritual when he lives in the presence of the ideal, and whether he eat or drink does so for the sake of a true and ultimate good."[4] And by its variations and greater or less transparency and ideality he believes the degree of spiritual insight which has been reached may be measured.[5]

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1. Op. cit. p. 84.
2. Idem. p. 196.
3. Idem. p. 195.
4. Idem. p. 193.
5. Idem. p. 228.

This intimate connection with the ideal is not original in most religions. It is only slowly and reluctantly that religion has suffered spiritualization.[1] Once, however, this life in the ideal has been attained, spirituality uses the strength of its position to remodel all it receives and to look to the future.

The first concern of spirituality is morality. There is another phase to rational religion--that of piety, or loyalty to necessary conditions. But this phase of devotion to the gods is never the source of morality; it is rather, Santayana states, an incidental expression of morality.[2]

Although morality is now closely associated with religion, yet morals have always flourished independent of theology. And only through spiritualization does religion acquire a coloring of morality. The Jews were among the first to link the two. Their prophets preached virtuous living as a means of salvation for their race from the wrath of Jehovah. "By assigning a magic value to morality," says Santayana, "they gave a moral value to religion."[3] For even superstitions may have a moral tinge in a moral mind. And what makes piety an integral part of traditional

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1. Op. cit. p. 68.

2. Idem. p. 187.

3. Idem. p. 74.

religions is the fact that moral realities are represented in the popular mind by poetic symbols.[1]

It has been stated previously that religion is concerned essentially with experience. If this be true, the ideal is fundamentally a part of rational religion, since it is a term of moral experience. Indeed, Santayana asserts that there can be no moral allegiance except to the ideal.[2] Further, rational religion should be an index to virtue, which Santayana calls "a natural excellence, the ideal expression of human life".[3] Insofar, then, as religion associates itself with virtue, or morality, it is truly an embodiment of the ideal.

One phase of religion which is often closely related to virtue and the ideal is immortality. It is a question which has interested all philosophers. "Enthusiasm for the ideal.....led Plato to treat all beauties as stepping-stones toward a perfect beauty in which all their charms might be present together, eternally and without alloy. Enthusiasm for the ideal.....persuaded him that mortal life was only an impeded effort to fall back into eternity."[4] Aristotle found no grounds for a belief in

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1. Op. cit. p. 180.
2. Idem. p. 98.
3. Idem. p. 73.
4. Idem. p. 133.

immortality of the soul. Neither did the Hebrews believe in a Heaven which should reward righteous living by prolonged existence. The early Christians, however, martyrs that they were to pagan torture, found the plan of salvation an ideal necessity.

Whether or not there be immortality of the soul, there does exist another sort of immortality, an ideal principle revealed to insight. Memory provides such a form, since it retains in the present what is long past. Further, even after a man's death, his works live on after him. And it is this continued existence which is the finest. For, "since the ideal has..... perpetual pertinence to mortal struggles," Santayana declares, "he who lives in the ideal and leaves it expressed in society or in art enjoys a double immortality."[1]

Perhaps the most common error in regard to religion, and illustrated by this very doctrine of immortality of the soul, is a belief that aims, because they are religious, must necessarily be attainable. Yet the ideals of religion may never be realized and the possibility of defeat is one of the circumstances with which meditation must square the ideal. But the trouble is not so much with religion it-

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1. Op. cit. p. 273.

self, but with that which it sets up as its ideal. "Ideals," says Santayana, "must not transgress certain bounds. The practical ideal, that which under the circumstances it is best to aim at and pray for, will not rebel against destiny."[1] Naturally, even religious ideals are not realizable together, or even singly when they have no deep roots in the world.[2]

The absence of this worldly quality is the reason why religion, which is so profoundly moving and so profoundly just, which is the source, perhaps, of the best human happiness, may still fail to function rationally. Santayana states the case in the following words: "Religion pursues rationality through the imagination..... When it gives precepts, insinuates ideals, or remoulds aspiration, it is an imaginative substitute for wisdom--I mean for the deliberate and impartial pursuit of all good. The conditions and the aims of life are both represented in religion poetically, but this poetry tends to arrogate to itself literal truth and moral authority, neither of which it possesses."[3]

If religion were content to imagine improvements all might be well and good. But when it takes the stand

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1. Op. cit. p. 44.

2. Introduction and Reason in Common Sense, p. 8.

3. Reason in Religion, p. 12.

that the world is really such as its imaginings, it fails signally as an exponent of the life of reason. Ideals, to be efficient, must have a natural basis, and the value of existences--religion among them--is wholly borrowed from their ideality.[1] It is the submerged idealism, Santayana declares, which alone should win for religion a philosopher's attention.[2]

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1. Op. cit. p. 249.

2. Idem. p. 68.

CHAPTER IV.

A CRITICAL SUMMARY.

In the life of reason the ideal plays a dual role. It is at once created and creator. A goal erected by awakening intelligence, it serves also as an urgent stimulus to the development of rationality. Granted entrance in the race with reason, it swiftly outstrips its slower fellow.

Such, at least, is the part which Santayana accredits to the ideal in The Life of Reason. And in his assumption he seems abundantly justified. The age of belief in a divine origin for man's higher aims has largely passed away, speeded by an amused and somewhat rueful recognition of the extreme diversity and the general inconsistency of human ideals. Santayana is right. Men do create their ideals. And further, they use their creations as levers by which to raise themselves. In stressing the importance of the elevating function of ideals Santayana has made a distinct contribution to social philosophy. Plato, before him, had emphasized the existence and the permanence of the ideal, but to the modern philosopher belongs the credit of giving life to this erstwhile inanimate realm.

There is at least an apparent inconsistency, however, between Santayana's conception of the ideal as an active guide in conduct, and his belief in the actual futility of thought as an agent in physical action. Santayana resembles Huxley in the theory that consciousness is merely the bell which tinkles an acknowledgment of physical events but which, in itself, is powerless to cause such events to occur. This negation of the motivating capacity of thought appears in Chapter IX. of the first volume of The Life of Reason, "How Thought Is Practical". Here Santayana outlines the sole practical value of thought as ideal. "Now the body is an instrument, the mind its function, the witness and reward of its operation," he states. The internal relation of ideas is purely dialectical. "Their realm is eternal and absolutely irrelevant to the march of events." Yet thought, according to Santayana, may still be instrumental in promoting morality, although morality is ordinarily considered inseparably wedded to conduct.

What, then, does Santayana mean? Is the ideal a beautiful fairy-tale, permanently delightful and aesthetically valuable, but still eternally a fairy-tale,--or do the creations of reason have some direct influence?

Thought, while essentially ideal, is yet natural. Nature is made up, not of actions, but of interactions. The stream may erode the rocks in its bed, but those rocks meantime retard its current. So thought, affected by conduct, ought in turn to influence physical activity.

And indeed, in this inconsistency of views, one suspects that Santayana actually finds more leeway for ideal action than the chapter recently cited might lead one to suppose. It is a pity, however, that Santayana should get himself into such a blind alley of logic. If one admits that reason has no power as a physical agent, then the value of the discussion of ideals is seriously impaired. What folly it would be to talk about ideals as guides in conduct, as aids in aspiration toward morality, and so on, when they can be, in reality, no such things! Either they, and thought with them, must be given some real inspirational function, or they are useless appendages not worthy of discussion.

The trouble is that Santayana gets into this impasse through the very method by which he first evolves his life of reason. Once a philosopher assumes the subjective point of view, he is doomed forever to certain difficulties which so far have proved insoluble. It is regretable that Santayana could not have adopted the

objectivity of the early Greeks, rather than the subjectivity of the later schools.

It is this point of view which forces him to the belief that knowledge is ideal--merely a matter of representation and never of actual contact. Whether or not this theory be true, it is seriously challenged by many of the modern philosophers, who believe the eternal barrier superable from another approach.

Another point open to question in Santayana's discussion of the ideal lies in the relation of value to origin. In that chapter devoted to a caustic summary of his critics, he laughs at them for believing "that ideas whose materials could all be accounted for in consciousness and referred to sense or to the operations of mind were thereby exhausted and deprived of further validity."[1] Their value is ideal--far from the plane of their origin. But no plant can long exist independent of the elements from which it springs. Insofar, therefore, as he estimates the value of ideals without reference to their originating conditions, Santayana is treading on dangerous ground. Wisely, however, he does not fail entirely to consider in his evaluation the source from which ideals have sprung. Indeed, in his discussion of

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1. The Life of Reason, vol. I., p. 84.

religious ideals he classifies as the least desirable those which arise from fear.

And here, again, a minor occasion for questioning occurs. In the early discussion of the life of reason Santayana warns away all critics. The philosopher who approaches the problem must neither create nor judge; he may only expound. The critical faculty, however, is not to be so easily subdued. Even Santayana cannot refrain from an occasional plunge into criticism and appraisal.

But, after all, these are minor points, unimportant perhaps beside many other exceptions which might be taken to Santayana's position. No philosophic system, however, has been found closed to question. And for the most part, the treatment of ideals in The Life of Reason is not only interesting but is highly instructive, a distinct addition to philosophic thought.

We are indebted to Santayana, in the first place, for bringing back to modernity the Greeks whom he so admires. His complication of their divergent interests is masterly. Plato plus Aristotle proves both a nourishing and a spicy dish, especially when sauced with Heraclitus and Parmenides. In this comprehensive summary and reinterpretation of their philosophies, therefore, Santayana has made the Greeks more readily available.

A further contribution lies in the lucidity with which Santayana endows the problem of the ideal. Whereas the Platonic ideal was left eternally up in the air, Santayana has brought his down to earth and has put it through its paces. No longer is it to be merely an idle figment of the imagination. He has endowed it with aesthetic and practical value and has made it a distinct factor in rational existence.

And this, probably, constitutes the greatest service originating from his discussion of the ideal. When Santayana first pointed out that ideals are pertinent because they arise in direct response to human demands, that they have a fundamentally natural basis, and that they are spiritual realities, he forged a weapon which should be efficacious in defeating the purely mechanistic course toward which modern thought appears to be turning.

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